

# LIFE

OF

# MARTIN VAN BUREN.



A meeting of the Executive Committee appointed by the large assemblage of Democratic citizens friendly to the nomination of MARTIN VAN BUREN, of New York, as the Republican candidate for President, which was held on the 7th of January last, was convened on Friday evening, January 5th, 1844; present,

JOHN H. DOHNERT, President.

Dr. David C. Skerrett, Col. William H. Boyce, Richard G. Laning, and Garret Hinkle, Vice Presidents.

William F. Kintzing and David Hanley, Secretaries.

It was *unanimously Resolved*, That the annexed biographical notice of the public life and political conduct and opinions of MARTIN VAN BUREN, on the truth and fidelity of the statements of which our fellow citizens may rely, be published and addressed to the Democracy of the United States; and that it be urged upon them to take immediate and active measures to promote the election of the Democratic candidate for the Presidency.

JOHN H. DOHNERT, President.

Wm. F. Kintzing, } Secretaries.  
David Hanley, }

## LIFE OF MARTIN VAN BUREN.

Martin Van Buren is presented to the people of the United States as a candidate to fill, for another term, the Executive chair, which has been occupied by Washington, Jefferson, Madison, and Jackson, because his life has displayed, from his earliest boyhood, and through every trying scene, that virtuous and honorable conduct, and those sterling political principles, which the people will demand in the man whom they select for that exalted trust.

### YOUTH AND EDUCATION.

His parentage, though humble, is respectable. He is the eldest son of Abraham Van Buren, an upright farmer of Kinderhook, in the State of New York, where he was born on the 5th of December, 1782. From his father, who had been actively devoted to his country's cause through the Revolution; who warmly espoused the principles of the Democratic party on the formation of the new Government; and who was among the earliest supporters of Jefferson, he derived, in the springtime of his youth, those political principles from which he has never swerved.

Thrown upon the resources of his own industry, Martin Van Buren left the humble academy of his native village at the age of fourteen, and commenced the study of the law, which he chose for his profession. At that youthful period, he evinced a strong passion for extempore speaking and literary composition. The native characteristics of his mind, which have since so much distinguished him, began thus early to display themselves. The declamation of the schoolboy was destined to ripen into the manly eloquence of the advocate and statesman; and his facility of composition into a compact, vigorous, and copious style. Even at that age he displayed a spirit of observation on public events, which was the germ of his future proficiency in the science of politics, and the knowledge of the human heart. He received no opinions on mere authority. He examined every proposition before expressing his concurrence or dissent. He was fond of argumentative discussion, thus developing a char-

acter which has since been marked by the clearness, soundness, and vigor of its reasoning. Such was the preparation with which Martin Van Buren entered upon life at the age of fourteen years. How encouraging to every young American is the example of his subsequent success! Humble and poor; but respectable, industrious and honest; having no patronage of connexions or friends, and born in a country village, but possessing sound principles, pure morals, and an upright heart—he started in the world with no greater advantages than those which belong to every youth in our wide and happy country!

During the following six years Mr. Van Buren closely studied his profession. He did not, however, withdraw from the animated and manly expression of his political opinions. Those six years embraced the trying period of the administration of the elder Adams; the days of the Federal 'reign of terror.' Though many of his youthful associates bowed to the power which was then in the ascendant, he manfully signalized the outset of his political career, by maintaining his Democratic sentiments, in addresses delivered at public meetings. He thus secured for himself, from the very commencement, the confidence of the Democracy around him, and while yet young in years, he took a part as active and efficient as more veteran politicians, in the animated contest which resulted in the overthrow of Federalism, and the triumphant election of the illustrious Jefferson, by the unbought suffrages of the American Democracy. At the age of eighteen he was chosen, as a Democratic Representative, in the convention of delegates from the counties of Rensselaer and Columbia, and from that time to this, he has never withdrawn himself from his connexion with the politics of his country, or his cordial fidelity to the principles of that party which honored him so early with its confidence.

In November, 1803, he was admitted to the bar, and the next spring made his first appearance as an elector, by acting, in common with the great body of the Democratic party, in supporting Morgan Lewis as Governor of New York, in opposition to Aaron Burr. At the bar, his untiring industry and excellent talents met with their deserved reward. He was brought into contact with men of distinguished ability. He did not shrink from the encounter. To the usual opposition of professional rivalry was added that of politics; for the able lawyers of his vicinity were chiefly in the ranks of his political adversaries. The conflict confirmed and strengthened his youthful powers, and his talent, skill, and success as a lawyer, soon equalled those with which he was called on to contend. In 1809, he removed, on account of the increase of his business, from Kinderhook to Hudson, the capital of the county.

#### WAR OF 1812—CONDUCT OF MR. VAN BUREN— ADDRESS TO GOVERNOR TOMPKINS.

In the times of high excitement, which preceded the declaration of war with Great Britain, he was prominent among those who labored to awaken, in our councils, a spirit of resistance towards the invaders of our neutral rights; and

the restrictive and retaliatory measures proposed by Mr. Jefferson, found in him a zealous advocate. As the crisis approached, his position enabled him to support the cause of his country with peculiar efficiency. In November, 1812, he took his seat in the Senate of the State of New York, to which he was elected for four years; and by the ardent patriotism and ability which marked his course through that period, in regard to every measure connected with the war, he secured and strengthened the popularity which he has ever since possessed with the Democracy of that State. In the usual system of falsehood which is characteristic of Federal electioneering, his course in regard to the war of 1812, (which was most decided and honorable, as it was strongly contrasted with the anti-American spirit that distinguished the Federalists,) has been, and continues to be chosen for the purpose of palming upon the community calumnies the most unjust, that have been a thousand times refuted. Conscious of the strong claims which his eminent services, during the war, have given him to the respect and favor of his country, his opponents, with more cunning than honesty, have endeavored to weaken them by assuming the attitude of accusers. The recorded evidence of the times is the most conclusive answer to their slanders.

It was, in fact, the manly stand in regard to the war, taken by Mr. Van Buren from the moment of its commencement to its end, and the consistency of his subsequent course, which secured for him that confidence of the Democratic party, in which he has had no rival; and it may be safely said that there is scarcely a single public man, now on the stage of action, of whose useful and energetic civil career, during that eventful period, so many and such favorable traces are to be found. This occurred, not because there were not thousands equally ardent in the cause, but from the circumstance of Mr. Van Buren's local position in respect to the principal theatre of action, and the station he occupied in the political party in the North, to which the Government had to look for support, against the machinations of Federalism and the plots of the Hartford Convention.

When Mr. Van Buren took his seat in the Senate of New York, he was, with perhaps one exception, the youngest man that had, up to that time, been ever elected to that body; it was his first appearance in any legislative assembly; yet notwithstanding his youth and inexperience, he was at once, from the confidence reposed in him, placed, by general consent, at the head of his party, to sustain the administration of the gallant Tompkins, and to breast the torrent of Federal opposition. He reported to the Senate, in November, 1812, in the first week of his legislative career, a spirited address, expressive of confidence in that truly Democratic Governor, and avowing a determination to 'apply the energies of the State to a vigorous prosecution of the war, until the necessity of its further continuance should be superseded by an honorable peace.'

During the winter session of 1813, Mr. Van Buren was found breasting the torrent of opposition, and supporting, with the zeal of a true patriot, every measure which had a tendency to



strengthen the arm of the National Government, or to give security to the extended frontiers of his own State. He resisted, with eloquence and success, the measures which the Federalists endeavored to introduce, in censure of the National Administration and the war; and when the same party assembled to convert into a matter of political speculation the affairs of our navy, whose glorious achievements had lowered upon the ocean the hoisted supremacy of the British flag, he signally rebuked them in a most able report.

At the same session he voted for and advocated a resolution authorizing a subscription of half a million of dollars to the war loan, which, however, was defeated by the Federalists in the other branch of the Legislature.

The close of that session was indeed an important crisis in the affairs of the Republic. The Federalists had obtained the control of the New England States. They not only refused all aid to the National Government in men and money, but a resolution was passed in Massachusetts, the leading State among them, declaring that it was 'unbecoming a moral and religious people to rejoice at the victories' achieved by our gallant countrymen. The syren song of 'peace, peace,' was sounded in the ears of a people suffering under the pressure of a war. The integrity of the Union—the continuance and support of that war for which the Southern, Western, and Middle States had offered up the blood of their gallant sons—depended on the firmness of the Democratic party in the great State of New York. The test question was the re-election of the brave and patriotic Tompkins as Governor. To secure this was to prostrate Federalism, and to secure a vigorous prosecution of the war. It was one of those occasions, of rare occurrence, of which it might be truly said: 'They are the times that try men's souls. In such a crisis, the summer soldier and the sunshine patriot shrinks from the service of his country; but he that stands it **THEN**, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman.' And where was Martin Van Buren in that day of anxiety and apprehension? Let the eloquent and patriotic address which was issued by the Democratic members of the New York Legislature, and written by him, answer that question. It was a manly, stirring, and irresistible appeal; and much do we regret that we have not space to present every line and word of it to those who read these pages. It unmasked the opponents of the war. It brought to the polls the true-hearted Democracy of New York, and the patriot Tompkins was triumphantly re-elected.

Soon after the Assembly met, in 1814, Mr. Van Buren introduced a bill to raise by classification, and place at the disposal of the General Government, twelve thousand men for two years, and so framed its provisions, that while it rendered the raising of the troops certain, it also placed a just share of the burden upon property, which the existing laws imposed chiefly upon those classes which were least able to bear it. This act has been truly described by Colonel Benton, in his letter to the committee of the Legislature of Mississippi, as 'THE MOST ENER-

GETIC WAR MEASURE EVER ADOPTED IN THIS COUNTRY.'

Shortly after this event, the news of the glorious victory of New Orleans reached Albany; and to Mr. Van Buren was immediately assigned the task of expressing the sentiments of the Legislature on that stirring event. His hand penned, at that early day, the resolutions of gratitude and applause to ANDREW JACKSON, little foreseeing that the Democracy of their common country was, at a future period, to unite their names as candidates for the highest gifts it could bestow. In a word, every act of Mr. Van Buren, every page of the legislative journal of his native State, contradicts the base calumnies of Federalism. He an opponent of the war! With as much justice might his enemies endeavor to convince the people of New York that Daniel D. Tompkins was opposed to the war, as Martin Van Buren. They stood side by side in that fearful contest; and, until the death of the former, they retained for each other that ardent attachment which springs up between those who have mingled their exertions, their hopes, and their fears, in trying times.

#### ATTORNEY GENERAL—SENATOR.

In 1815, Mr. Van Buren was appointed Attorney General of the State of New York, and one of the Regents of the University, and in the following spring he was re-elected to the Senate for the further term of four years. Throughout the whole period in which he held a seat in that body, he continued to give renewed evidence of the soundness of his political principles, so as to secure more and more the confidence and affection of the Republican party; and such was the distinguished talent, ability, firmness, and discretion which he displayed, that he continued to be regarded, by the general assent of his political associates, as the most prominent person in their ranks. It would far exceed the limits of this sketch, to trace his efficient and industrious course in regard to the numerous and important measures which came before the Senate during those eight years, but it may be said that there was not one of them, to which he did not turn his sagacious and powerful mind, and which he did not test upon those principles to which he always adhered.

#### OPINIONS ON BANKS AND CORPORATIONS—IMPRISONMENT FOR DEBT—ERIE CANAL.

Among Mr. Van Buren's labors in the State Senate, may be particularly noticed his course in regard to corporate power and its abuses, since he then exhibited the same jealousy of it by which his subsequent life has been throughout so prominently distinguished. It was in those eight years that the broad foundation of the banking system of the State of New York was laid. He opposed, with a single exception, every one of the numerous banks then established, and he ardently and vigorously admonished his political friends, again and again, that they were creating a power that would ultimately attempt to subvert the principles of Republican Government. The exception was the establishment of a bank at Buffalo, after the destruction of the

town by the British; even to this he assented with reluctance, and, while doing so, excused it in his place, as being in effect a war measure. There are few American statesmen whose political career exhibits a course of conduct so uniform and unexceptionable, as that of Mr. Van Buren in regard to banks.

As long before as the year 1813, he had commenced a series of efforts to abolish imprisonment for debt. These he continued in 1817, 1818, and 1820, and they led at last to the full accomplishment of that great and philanthropic object in his own State. When he was subsequently transferred to the National Legislature, he found Col. Richard M. Johnson there introducing and advocating the measures on the same subject, which have gained for him such distinguished honor. He united at once in most active co-operation with that brave and generous man and patriotic statesman, and continued to give him efficient assistance as long as he continued in the Senate of the United States.

It was during the period that Mr. Van Buren was a member of the Senate of New York, that the great system of internal improvement was commenced, which has since conferred so much honor and advantage on the people of the State. Casting behind him all the prejudices of party, he joined his efforts with those of Governor Clinton to carry through that noble work, and no candid and intelligent person now denies that, without his co-operation, it could not then have prevailed against the strong opposition which it had to encounter.

#### STATE CONVENTION—REFORM OF THE CONSTITUTION.

In 1819, the Democratic party having, for a time, lost its ascendancy, Mr. Van Buren was removed from the office of Attorney General, but shortly after, the convocation of the State Convention to reform the Constitution, gave the people an opportunity of showing that their regard towards him was undiminished. Though he was a resident of Albany, yet the electors of the Democratic county of Otsego selected him as their delegate, and he had thus an opportunity of uniting the influence of his talents, principles, and judgment, with those of other distinguished Democrats, to infuse into the new Constitution a broader republican spirit. To no one, indeed, more peculiarly than to himself, did the convention owe its origin. Having been appointed to preside at a celebration of the fourth of July, in the year 1826, he took the occasion to break ground on the subject, having already, for some time, reflected on the necessity of the measure. He gave from the chair, with appropriate remarks, this sentiment: 'The Elective Franchise: existing restrictions have proved to be as impolitic as they are unjust; it is the office of wisdom to correct what experience condemns.' The sentiment was not more just in itself, than it was well-timed, and extensively useful. It was the signal gun that summoned into vigorous action that spirit of discontent with various provisions in the existing Constitution, which had long existed among the Democracy of the State, and which, after overcoming all the obstacles oppos-

ed by the aristocratic party, ultimately triumphed in the passage of the law, by virtue of which the convention met.

#### ELECTIVE FRANCHISE—FREEHOLD QUALIFICATION.

The first great topic to which the attention of the rival parties was directed was, therefore, the ELECTIVE FRANCHISE. By the old Constitution of New York, a vast number of useful and intelligent citizens were excluded from voting for Representatives, and more than a third of the males over twenty-one years of age, were cut off from voting for Senators and Governor altogether, because they were not freeholders. The disfranchisement of so large a portion of the intelligent population, was one of the principal inducements of the Republican party in advocating the convention; and when it met, Mr. Van Buren was the leading advocate in procuring its abolition. Upon this question the party lines were distinctly drawn. The Democrats at once offered an amendment to abolish the freehold qualification, which was met by an effort on the part of the Federal leaders to require a property qualification of two hundred and fifty dollars. This grand movement of Federalism was at once opposed by Mr. Van Buren and his friends, and was defeated. His speech, at the time, which has been often published, and widely circulated, is so replete with sound doctrines and eloquent discussion on this cardinal feature of Republican institutions, that we are induced to insert here, at length, some of its principal passages.

#### SPEECH IN THE NEW YORK CONVENTION AGAINST THE FREEHOLD QUALIFICATION.

'Mr. Van Buren said there were two words, which had come into common use with our Revolutionary struggle—words which contained an abridgment of our political rights—words which, at that day, had a talismanic effect—which led our fathers from the bosom of their families to the tented field—which for seven long years of toil and suffering, had kept them to their arms, and which finally conducted them to a glorious triumph. They were 'TAXATION and REPRESENTATION.' Nor did they lose their influence with the close of that struggle. They were never heard in our halls of legislation, without bringing to our recollections the consecrated feelings of those who won our liberties, or without reminding us of every thing that was sacred in principle.

'Apply, said he, 'for a moment, the principles they inculcate, to the question under consideration, and let its merits be thereby tested. Are those of your citizens represented, whose voices are never heard in your Senate? Are those citizens in any degree represented or heard in the formation of your courts of justice, from the highest to the lowest? Was, then, representation in one branch of the Legislature, which by itself can do nothing—which, instead of securing to them the blessings of legislation, only enables them to prevent it as an evil, any thing more than a shadow? Was it not emphatically 'keeping the word of promise to the ear, and breaking it to the hope?' Was it not even less than the virtual representation with which our fathers



were attempted to be appeased by their oppressors? It was even so; and if so, could they, as long as this distinction was retained, hold up their heads, and, without blushing, pretend to be the advocates for that special canon of political rights, that taxation and representation were, and ever should be, indissoluble? He thought not.

'In whose name, and for whose benefit, he inquired, were they called upon to disappoint the just expectations of their constituents, and to persevere in what he could not but regard as a violation of principle? It was in the name and for the security of FARMERS, that they were called upon to adopt this measure. This, 'he said,' was indeed acting in an imposing name; and they who used it knew full well that it was so. It was (continued Mr. Van Buren) the boast, the pride, and the security of this nation, that she had in her bosom a body of men, who, for sobriety, integrity, industry and patriotism, were unequalled by the cultivators of the earth in any part of the known world. Nay, more; to compare them with men of similar pursuits in other countries, was to degrade them. And woful must be our degeneracy, before any thing which might he supposed to affect the interests of the farmers of this country, could be listened to with indifference by those who governed us.

'He could not, he said, yield to any man in respect for this invaluable class of our citizens, nor in zeal for their support; but how did this matter stand? inquired Mr. Van Buren. Was the allegation that they were violating the wishes, and tampering with the security of the farmers, founded in fact, or was it merely colorable? Who, he asked, had hitherto constituted a majority of the voters of the State? The FARMERS. Who had called for and insisted upon the convention? FARMERS and FREEHOLDERS. Who passed the law admitting those who were not electors, to a free participation in the decision of the question of 'convention or no convention,' and also in the choice of delegates to that body? A Legislature, a majority of whom were farmers, and probably every one of them freeholders of the value of two hundred and fifty dollars and upwards! The farmers of this State had, he said, by an overwhelming majority, admitted those who were not freeholders to a full participation with themselves in every stage of this great effort to amend our Constitution, and to ameliorate the condition of the people. Could he, then, ought he to be told, that they would be disappointed in their expectations, when they found that by the provisions of the Constitution as amended, a great proportion of their fellow-citizens were enfranchised, and released from fetters which they themselves had done all in their power to loosen? He did not believe it.

'It is only, said Mr. Van Buren, to protect property against property, that a provision in the Constitution, basing the representation on property, is, or ought to be desired in one branch of the Government. It is when improvements are contemplated at the public expense, and when, for those and for other objects, new impositions are to be put upon property; then it is that the interests of different sections of the

State come in contact; and then it is that their respective weight in the Legislature becomes important to them.

'Under the present Constitution, as it now stands, said Mr. Van Buren, that inequality must and would continue; and he would ask whether it was desirable to retain this distinction as it now existed, and whether it was productive of one solitary advantage? He thought not; and so he believed all reflecting men, on examination, would likewise think.

'And what, he inquired, had been its practical effects? Had they been such as to afford any additional security to property? Had the members of the Senate, for years past, been more respectable for talents or integrity? Had they shown a greater regard for property? Had they been more vigilant in guarding the public treasury than the Assembly?

'The Senate, he said, was the only legislative body in which he had ever had the honor of a seat; and he had been there from a very early age—almost all his political connexions had been with that body—his earliest political recollections were associated with its proceedings, and he had had in some of its proceedings as much cause for individual gratification as could well, under the same circumstances, fall to the lot of any man; notwithstanding which, and also the strong partiality he had always felt for that body, he could not say, that in the many years he was there, the sentiment ever occurred to him that such was the case. On the contrary, a regard to truth constrained him to say, that every thing which regarded the imposition of public burdens, and the disposition of public property, was more closely looked into, and more severely scrutinized by the Assembly than the Senate. The sense of the immediate responsibility to the people, produced more effect on the Assembly, than the consideration that they represented those who were supposed principally to bear the burdens, did in the Senate; and such, he conscientiously believed, would always be the case. He asked the members of the committee whether they believed there had been a moment, for the last forty years, when a proposition in the Assembly to make an unjust distinction between real and personal property, in the imposition of public burdens, would not have been hooted out of that body, if any one had been found mad enough to have dared its introduction? Why, then, he asked, alarm ourselves by fears for the future, which the experience of the past had demonstrated to be erroneous? Why disregard the admonitions of experience, to pursue the dubious path of speculation and theory?

'We were, said Mr. Van Buren, referred by the honorable mover of the amendment, to the opinion of Mr. Jefferson, as expressed in his Notes on Virginia. In making that reference, the honorable gentleman had done himself credit; and had rendered but justice to the merits of the distinguished individual whose opinion he had sought to enlist on his side. He had truly said, that now, when the strong party feeling which attended the public measures in which Mr. Jefferson was an actor, had in some degree subsided, most men united in the acknowledgment of his de-

serts. That sentiment, however, it appeared, was not general, since the gentleman from Columbia (Mr E. Williams) distinctly avows the retention of his old prejudices. Whilst that gentleman was trumpet-tongued in denouncing the impropriety of indulgence in party feelings by others, he had given them the strongest reason to believe that his own were immortal; that they had not only survived the 'era of good feeling' through which we had passed, but were likely to continue, but that, notwithstanding he still thought of Mr. Jefferson as he always had done, he would condescend to use him for the occasion. Sir, said Mr. Van Buren, it is grating to one's feelings to hear a man who has done his country the greatest service, and who at this moment occupies more space in the public mind than any other private citizen in the world, thus spoken of. But no more of this.

"Mr. Jefferson did complain, in 1781, of the Constitution of Virginia, because the two branches of their Legislature were not sufficiently dissimilar, but he did not point out the mode in which he thought that object could be best effected. But in 1783, when, as he had before stated, a convention was expected in Virginia, he prepared a form of government to be submitted to the people, in which he provided the same qualification for both branches, and showed clearly either that his opinion had undergone a change on the subject, or that he supposed the object would be effected by the difference of their term of service, and the districts they represented.

"If he could possibly believe, added Mr. Van Buren, that any portion of the calamitous consequences could result from the rejection of the amendment, which had been so feelingly portrayed by the honorable gentleman from Albany, (Mr Kent) and for whom he would repeat the acknowledgment of his respect and regard, he would be the last man in society who would vote for it. But believing, as he conscientiously did, that those fears were altogether unfounded, hoping and expecting that the happiest results would follow from the abolition of the freehold qualification, and hoping, too, that caution and circumspection would preside over the settlement of the general right of suffrage, which was hereafter to be made, and knowing, besides, that this State, in abolishing the freehold qualifications, would be but uniting herself in the march of principle which had already prevailed in every State of the Union, except two or three, including the royal charter of Rhode Island, he would cheerfully record his vote against the amendment."

We are assured by those who well recollect the circumstances, that the effect of this powerful and well-reasoned speech upon the convention was obvious, and was conceived to be decisive of the question.

#### RIGHT OF NEGROES TO VOTE—ABOLITIONISM—MISSOURI QUESTION.

This chief citadel of the aristocracy having been triumphantly carried, the Democratic members proceeded to the adjustment of the new and extended suffrage. Diversities of opinion as to details, of course prevailed among them, but they

finally agreed, with great unanimity, to extend this invaluable right to all white persons who had resided in the State one year, and six months in the county, and during that time contributed to the support of the Government, either by paying taxes or by labor on the highways, or by service in the militia.

In the course of this adjustment, a difficulty arose that threatened, for a time, the greatest danger to the proceedings of the convention, but it was finally arranged, with that prudence, caution and efficiency which so peculiarly distinguish Mr. Van Buren's political measures. The negroes, with scarcely an exception, adhered to the Federalists. Their number in the city of New York was very great, and parties in that city were so equally divided, that it was often sufficient to hold the balance between them, at times, too, when the vote of New York, in the Legislature, not unfrequently decided the majority of that body. These circumstances made the Federalists, in the convention, anxious to preserve for the blacks that equality of suffrage with the whites which they had under the old constitution, and they determined, if it was taken away, to avail themselves of the great excitement then existing in the State on the Missouri question, for the purpose of defeating the proceedings of the convention altogether. The able men by whom they were represented in that body, spared no effort to secure one or the other of these results. On the other hand, the Republican members were unanimous in the opinion that the negroes were unsafe depositories of the elective franchise; but they differed at first, as to the mode by which their common object could be best attained. A portion of them, in their desire to accomplish it, advocated a direct and simple provision for the exclusion of the blacks. Another portion, of whom Mr Van Buren was one, thought it unwise to expose all the amendments of the Constitution, which were of such vital importance to the welfare of the State, to the hazard of rejection; and desired, therefore, the adoption of a provision which would be, in practice, perfectly safe, while, at the same time, it frustrated the plans of the federal opponents of the new Constitution. It was also in itself more equitable, as it afforded an opportunity, and held out an inducement to the negroes, to improve their own condition, and acquire habits of industry and sobriety. The plan proposed for this end, was to allow them to vote only in the event of their possessing a freehold of the value of two hundred and fifty dollars, and having been three years residents of the State, and been rated and actually paid taxes. This proposition the Federalists opposed with even greater acrimony than the absolute exclusion of the negroes, because they perceived that it would, in all probability, defeat both their objects. The Republican members all finally assented to it, and the result proved to be that which its advocates had anticipated. The question as to the free blacks became a subordinate one in the opposition to the new Constitution; the amendments, submitted in a body, were all adopted; the people gained the invaluable right of a free and extended suffrage, while such a spectacle as a black voter at the polls of N. York



has ever since been one of the rarest things under the sun. After an experience of twenty years, the provision in question remains unchanged. Several amendments have been added to the Constitution in that interval; the right of suffrage has been materially changed in other respects; yet so satisfied have been the wise of all parties, that no successful attempt has ever been made to set this regulation aside.

It must however be admitted, that Mr Van Buren's lot in regard to it has been a singular one. It was a principal cause of that fierce hostility with which the Abolitionists have ever since regarded him; and yet, from the period when he first became the Democratic candidate for the Vice Presidency, it has been selected by the Southern Federalists as their most untiring theme of vituperation. That the censures of the latter are peculiarly unjust, this exposition, which has been often made, of his course in regard to this particular measure, abundantly proves; but, in addition to this, it may be truly said that no public man in the Northern States ever evinced a more uniform determination to pursue, in regard to all questions of negro slavery, that course which is demanded from all who respect the rights of the South and the compromises of the Constitution. At the early period to which we have been referring, it is true, that abolitionism had not given to the question that deep political and social importance which is now connected with it; yet even then we may trace, in these acts of the Democratic party, striking indications of that respect for the rights of our Southern brethren which has been since displayed in a more marked, if not more effective manner.

Nor in fact was this the only evidence that Mr Van Buren gave, about the same time, of the spirit with which he was actuated on this question. An incident, connected with the Missouri controversy, occurred, which evinced a similar determination, and showed the early and settled purpose of his mind. A public meeting was called at Albany to discuss the exciting topic. It consisted of both the friends and opponents of this State Administration. A memorial to Congress was agreed upon, containing injurious expressions in regard to slavery in the Southern States. When Mr Van Buren was asked to sign it, he distinctly and unequivocally refused, from disapprobation of its sentiments, although his refusal involved him in an angry correspondence.

The attention of the Legislature of New York was also subsequently called to the subject by the message of Governor Clinton, at the commencement of the session, and an expression of their opinion in regard to it earnestly recommended. A resolution to that effect was introduced in the House of Assembly by a friend of the State Administration, and was passed by that body. This resolution was sent to the Senate, of which Mr Van Buren was a member, and was there also passed, but without division or debate. Mr Van Buren had no agency in bringing the subject before the Legislature. He was present when it passed, but did not participate further in the matter than is here stated.

#### *Interference with Slavery in the States—Abolition of Slavery in the District of Columbia.*

We cannot close our notice of Mr Van Buren's course while in the Legislature of New York, on this whole subject, without referring to the clear and deliberate expression of his sentiments which he has given in a letter addressed by him to the Democratic Central Committee of Kentucky. If any doubt could have been created by the censures of his opponents, to which we have alluded, this able and honorable exposition must remove it from the mind of every candid man. The letter is dated on the 21st April, 1840. In concluding it he says—

"No one can doubt that the tendency of this species of agitation is, as your House of Representatives have very justly observed, to disturb the amicable relations subsisting between the slaveholding and non-slaveholding States of this Union; and it is not the least remarkable feature in its history, that the means employed are precisely those best calculated to defeat the avowed objects of its authors. It is, to my mind, a most dangerous delusion, to believe that the people of the slaveholding States are likely to be induced to change a condition of things over which, under the Constitution, they alone have the control, which they had no agency in producing, and for the consequences of which, whatever they may be, they cannot be justly held responsible—which is interwoven with their domestic relations and political institutions—by charging its existence upon them as a crime against God and man, against humanity and religion; or that to awaken the apprehensions of the master by appeals to the passions of the slave, is the way to improve the condition of the latter. All candid and temperate observers must, on the contrary, admit that such are not the means by which salutary ends are produced—that furious denunciations and unmitigated reproaches as little accord with Christian charity as with brotherly love, and are much more likely to produce stern resistance than quiet acquiescence. These truths are demonstrated in the results of the labors of the Abolitionists in the United States, which have hitherto been productive of nothing but evil, new restraints upon the colored race, vexation to the owner, and distraction to the councils of the nation. In reference then, to such practices as those to which you have called my attention, I can, as a public man, find the path of duty only in one direction—that of undisguised opposition."

#### *Right of Suffrage—Letter to the Citizens of Rhode Island.*

The extension of the right of suffrage among the white population, which Mr Van Buren had thus been mainly instrumental in introducing, he continued zealously to promote; and it was subsequently increased by additional amendments of the Constitution of New York. It is impossible, for want of space, to trace in detail all his efforts on this vital question of a Republican Government; but he so well explained them in writing some years since to certain citizens of Rhode Island, that his letter to them, written in July 1833, presents a summary of his conduct and opinions on this great point, and at that important period

of his political life. Published as it has been, again and again, and never controverted, it affords to the whole American People the most conclusive evidence of his sentiments.

The other questions of public interest discussed by the convention in which he took part, and invariably on the side of liberal principles, must be passed over for the same want of space properly to exhibit them, but the journals of that body may be appealed to as affording a proof of the soundness of his views upon them all.

*Senator of the United States—National Bank.*

In 1821 Mr Van Buren was elected by the Legislature of New York a Senator of the U. States. He continued in the Senate more than seven years, being re-elected on the expiration of his first term, and, in that enlarged field, he displayed the same abilities, and soon acquired the same elevated rank which he had attained in the councils of his own State. In the discussion of all great questions of public policy, his opinions were promptly and ably expressed; and the same consistency and decision which had early secured the confidence of his political friends, still distinguished him.

In regard to a Bank of the United States, a protective tariff and a system of internal improvements, topics involving the deepest interest, his views have been fully and unreservedly communicated to the people of the United States, in a letter addressed, in the year 1832, to a committee appointed by a meeting held at Shoeco Springs in North Carolina, and in his celebrated letter to Sherrod Williams in 1836, both of which have been extensively published throughout the Union.

On the first of these topics he expressed the following sentiments in the letter to Sherrod Williams:

"I am induced to embrace for this purpose the opportunity you have presented to me the more readily, from a deep conviction of the incalculable importance to the people of the United States that this long agitated and distracting subject should be finally settled, and from a hope that what I have to say upon it may, from the situation in which the partiality of my fellow-citizens has placed me, contribute in some degree to so desirable a result.

"I greatly fear, that whilst there is in any quarter reason to hope that a charter for a new bank can in any condition of the country be obtained from the Federal Government, there will be neither order nor stability in the pecuniary operations of the country. If it can be ascertained that a discredited currency and pecuniary embarrassments will bring a charter, what security have we that such a state of things will not be produced? Is it doing violence to truth and justice, to attribute to expectations of this character the crusade which we have witnessed for the last two years against the deposit banks, against the efforts of the administration to secure a specie currency, and against all the fiscal arrangements of the treasury? Will any candid and well-informed man pretend that such things would have been, if it had been considered as settled that the Bank of the United States is not to be revived? I

think not. The settlement of the deposit question by the bill of the last session, will doubtless cause a suspension of this destructive career—but is there not reason to apprehend that it will recommence with the first appearance of any thing like a reasonable chance for the re-establishment of a National Bank? Every thing, therefore, which may serve to arrest or prevent the agitation of this subject, if only for a season, is of great value. In the published opinions to which I have already referred, my opposition to the establishment of the United States Bank, in any of the States, is placed on the want of the constitutional power in Congress to establish one. Those who concur in denying this power, nevertheless differ among themselves in regard to the particular views by which their respective opinions are sustained. Some admit that Congress has a right to create such an institution, whenever its establishment becomes necessary to the collection, disbursement and preservation of the revenue; but insist that no such necessity existed when the charter of the old bank expired, or has arisen since. With this class, the considerations to which you allude would be essential, and might have a controlling effect—for such persons make the power to establish a bank dependent upon them. My objection, on the contrary, is that the Constitution does not give Congress the power to erect corporations within the States. This was the main point of Mr Jefferson's celebrated opinion against the establishment of the first National Bank. It is an objection which nothing short of an amendment to the Constitution can remove. We know it to be an historical fact, that the convention refused to confer that power on Congress, and I am opposed to its assumption by it upon any pretence whatever. If its possession shall at any time become necessary, the only just way to obtain it is to ask it at the hands of the people, in the form prescribed by the constitution. Holding this opinion, and sworn to support that instrument as it is, I could not find in the circumstances to which you refer, either warrant or excuse for the exercise of the authority in question; and I am not only willing but desirous that the people of the United States should be fully informed of the precise ground I occupy on this subject. I desire more especially that they should know it now, when an opportunity, the best our form of government affords, will soon be presented to express their opinion of its propriety. If they are in favor of a National Bank, as a permanent branch of their institutions, or if they desire a Chief Magistrate who will consider it his duty to watch the course of events, and give or withhold his assent to such an institution according to the degree of necessity for it that may in his opinion arise from the considerations to which your question refers, they will see that my co-operation in the promotion of either of these views cannot be expected. If, on the other hand, with this seasonable, explicit and published avowal before them, a majority of the people of the United States shall nevertheless bestow upon me their suffrages for the office of President, scepticism itself must cease to doubt, and admit their will to be, that there shall not be any Bank of the United States, until the people, in the ex-



ercise of their sovereign authority, see fit to give to Congress the right to establish one.”

*Internal Improvement—Protective Tariff.*

The letter to the committee appointed at the meeting held at Shocco Springs, while it repeats in general terms, these views in regard to a National Bank, explains, with great fullness, the sentiments by which Mr Van Buren was guided in his public course on the two other topics—a protective tariff and internal improvements. In that letter he said:

“Although my official acts in relation to the protective system might be well regarded as rendering the avowal necessary, I think it, nevertheless, proper to say, that I believe the establishment of commercial regulations, with a view to the encouragement of domestic products, to be within the constitutional power of Congress. Whilst, however, I have entertained this opinion, it has never been my wish to see the power in question exercised with an oppressive inequality upon any portion of our citizens, or for the advantage of any one section of the Union at the expense of another. On the contrary, I have at all times believed it to be the sacred duty of those who are entrusted with the administration of the Federal Government, to direct its operation in the manner best calculated to distribute, as equally as possible, its burdens and blessings amongst the several states and the people. My views upon this subject were several years ago spread before the people of this State, and have since been widely diffused through the medium of the public press. My object at that time was to invite the attention of my immediate constituents to a dispassionate consideration of the subject in its various bearings, being well assured that such an investigation would bring them to a standard which, from its moderation and justice, would furnish the best guarantee for the true interests of all. If, as has been supposed, those views have contributed in any degree to produce a state of feeling so much to be desired, I have reason to be gratified with the result.

“The protective system and its proper adjustment, became a subject of frequent and necessary consideration, whilst I formed a part of the cabinet; and the manner in which the President proposed to carry into effect the policy in relation to imposts, recommended in his previous messages, has since been avowed with that frankness which belongs to his character. To this end, he recommended ‘a modification of the tariff, which should produce a reduction of the revenue to the wants of the Government, and an adjustment of the duty upon imports, with a view to equal justice in relation to all our national interests, and to the counteraction of foreign policy, so far as it may be injurious to those interests.’

“In these sentiments I fully concur; and I have been thus explicit in the statement of them, that there may be no room for misapprehension as to my own views upon the subject. A sincere and faithful application of these principles to our legislation, unwarping by private interest or political design—a restriction of the wants of the Government to a simple and economical administration of its affairs—the only administration which is consistent with the purity and stability of the

Republican system—a preference in encouragement given to such manufactures as are essential to the national defence, and its extension to others in proportion as they are adapted to our country, and of which the raw material is produced by ourselves, with a proper respect for the rule which demands that all taxes should be imposed in proportion to the ability and condition of the contributors, would, I am convinced, give ultimate satisfaction to a vast majority of the people of the United States, and arrest that spirit of discontent which is now unhappily so prevalent, and which threatens such extensive injury to the institutions of our country.

“Internal improvements are so diversified in their nature, and the possible agency of the Federal Government in their construction so variable in its character and degree, as to render it not a little difficult to lay down any precise rule that will embrace the whole subject. The broadest and best defined division is that which distinguishes between the direct construction of works of internal improvement by the General Government, and pecuniary assistance given by it to such as are undertaken by others. In the former are included the right to make and establish roads and canals within the States, and the assumption of as much jurisdiction over the territory they may occupy, as is necessary to their preservation and use. The latter is restricted to simple grants of money, in aid of such works, when made under State authority.

“The Federal Government does not, in my opinion, possess the power first specified; nor can it derive it from the assent of the State in which such works are to be constructed. The money power, as it is called, is not so free from difficulty. Various rules have from time to time been suggested by those who properly appreciate the importance of precision and certainty in the operations of the Federal power; but they have been so frequently infringed upon by the apparently unavoidable action of the Government, that a final and satisfactory settlement of the question has been prevented. The wide difference between a definition of the power in question upon paper, and its practical application to the operations of Government, has been sensibly felt by all who have been entrusted with the management of public affairs. The whole subject was reviewed in the President’s Maysville message. Sincerely believing that the best interests of the whole country, the quiet, not to say the stability, of the Union, and the preservation of that moral force which perhaps as much as any other, holds it together, imperiously required that the destructive course of legislation upon that subject then prevalent, should, in some proper and constitutional way, be arrested, I throughout gave to the measure, of which that document was an exposition, my active, zealous and anxious support.

“In this avowal I am certainly not influenced by feelings of indifference, much less of hostility to internal improvements. As such, they can have no enemies. I have never omitted to give them all the proper aid in my power, for which, by the way, I claim no particular merit, as I do not believe there is an honest and sane man in the country who does not wish to see them prosper;

but their construction, and the manner in which, and the means by which they are to be effected, are quite different questions. Rather than again expose our legislation to all the corrupting influences of those scrambles and combinations in Congress which have been heretofore witnessed, and the other affairs of the country to the injurious effects unavoidably resulting from them, it would, in my opinion, be infinitely preferable to leave works of the character spoken of and not embraced in the exception which has been pointed out, for the present, to the supports upon which they have reposed with so much success for the last two years, viz: State efforts and private enterprise. If the great body of the people become convinced that the progress of these works should be accelerated by the Federal arm, they will not refuse to come to some proper constitutional arrangement upon the subject. The supposition that an equitable rule, which pays a proper respect to the interests and condition of the different States, could fail to receive ultimately the constitutional sanction, would be doing injustice to the intelligence of the country. By such a settlement of the question, our political system, in addition to the other advantages derived from it, would, in relation to this subject at least, be relieved from those dangerous shocks which spring from diversities of opinion upon constitutional points of deep interest; and, in the mean time, the resources of the country would be best husbanded by being left in the hands of those by whose labor they are produced."

*Revolutionary Pensioners—Abolition of Imprisonment for Debt.*

It is impossible, in the limits of a sketch like this, to attempt to notice many, even the most prominent, of Mr. Van Buren's legislative efforts while he continued in the Senate of the U. States; but we cannot omit to insert some passages from his speeches in favor of the Revolutionary veteran, and the furtherance of that great object—the Abolition of Imprisonment for Debt—to which we have already adverted as engaging his attention in the Legislature of New York.

In his speech on the bill granting pensions to the surviving officers of the revolutionary army, he said—

"If, sir, gallantry in the field, and devotion to country ever deserved the meed of grateful remembrance, the encomiums bestowed by my colleagues upon the revolutionary officers will find their approval in every patriot bosom. But their merits, great as they were, appear to be enhanced by the cause in which they were engaged. Revolutions in government had been witnessed before, and they have been witnessed since. But if we consider the principles involved, the means employed, and the results produced, may I not be indulged in expressing the conviction that they dwindle into insignificance with this. The Revolution in which they embarked was not only the most important in civil government that oppression has produced or patriotism accomplished, but must, in the nature of things, forever remain so. The materials for another equally important do not, I fear, exist; and perhaps the progressive character of man precludes a well-grounded hope that they will ever again arise. Why,

sir, said he, do I allude to these high considerations? Not, I am sure, for the purpose of display, and as little with a view to indulge in self-adulation. It is because the unparalleled blessings, which, as a people, we enjoy—the great and successful example that has been given to the world, and the perpetual influence which that example must exert in its future destinies, awaken in every mind the most intense anxiety, lest the closing scenes of that mighty conflict should be unworthy of its own great character, and that the page of history which embalms the virtue and heroic deeds of our fathers may not at the same time record the too early degeneracy of their sons. The petitioners at your bar are destined to be our witnesses with posterity. It is in their persons that an opportunity is afforded either to repel, or in some degree confirm, the imputation cast upon Republics by the enemies of freedom, that ingratitude is their inherent and inextinguishable vice; and it was earnestly to be hoped that our decision might be such as would be favorable to them, to ourselves, and to the cause of liberty.

"A question arises for our decision no less important to the Government than to the petitioners, because involving the character of the one and the interest of the other. What is it? Is it confined to the legal rights and obligations of the parties? No, sir, I shall never, said he, bring my mind to consider the question of strict legal right when I look at the parties. Who are they? On the one hand the Government of the U. States, not liable to be impeaded, and incapable of being coerced against its will by any power superior to its own—rich in resources and overflowing with redundancy; on the other, a remnant of the officers of the revolutionary army, borne down by the infirmities incident to age—with one foot in the grave, and the other upon the threshold of your door, supplicating the fulfilment of that promise which was made them in the vigor of their days. If even they have legal rights, where is their remedy to enforce them? They cannot in the nature of things have any. But candor constrained him to acknowledge, that in strictness, they have not now, whatever they may once have had, any rights, except such as are founded upon the immutable principles of justice. As early as the year 1785, the Government found it necessary to protect itself against dormant and unfounded claims arising from the revolutionary contest, by a statute of limitations. Various acts and resolutions were passed upon the subject before the year 1793, more or less comprehensive in their terms; and in that year an act was passed so comprehensive in its provisions, as to embrace the claims of the petitioners; and barring them, unless presented by the 1st day of May, 1794. The officers did not present this claim until 1810, and are therefore precluded from urging their vested legal rights. Being thus furnished with a general answer to all claims which do not address both our consciences and judgments, Congress have nevertheless relaxed, from time to time, the rigor of their own act, when considering claims founded on justice and not opposed by policy. But as none of these suspensions have embraced the case of the petitioners, we have it in *our power*, if we can have the heart to present this statute of



limitations to the petitioners, and under its mantle resist the cry for justice, if not for bread. The question, then, is not what we are bound to do by law, but what we should do. What conduct on our part will bear the scrutiny [and the judgments of impartial men, when the opportunity to remedy the consequences of our decision shall have passed away?"

"The petitioners with reason complained that without ever having consented to be bound by the acts of their brother officers, their personal rights were made to depend upon the decision of the lines, and not upon their own individual assent. This is admitted to have been the fact.—Two months were allowed to the officers of the lines, under the immediate command of General Washington, and six months to those of the Southern army, to give their assent to the compromise. It does not appear that the lines of the Southern army ever gave their assent. Indeed it is stated by a distinguished revolutionary officer on this floor, (Gen. S. Smith) that they never did. It does not appear that there ever was a meeting of the officers of the Northern army, for the purpose of deciding upon the question; and it is affirmed that there was none. To assume, then, that the assent of each individual was given under circumstances like these, appears to my mind harsh and unjust. But it is alleged, in extenuation, that the compromise was made upon the petition of the officers themselves. Let this be admitted: did the application for a just equivalent for the promised half pay for life confer on Congress the right to prescribe the terms? Will it justify the allowance of less than that to which they were entitled? Will not the circumstances under which this application was made, present a still stronger appeal to your liberality, if not your gratitude?"

"Look, said Mr Van Buren, at the acts of these brave and high-minded men, in whatever light you please; examine their conduct by the strictest scrutiny, and you will always find them exhibiting the purest principles and the most elevated patriotism. The half pay establishment for life, was at that time considered by the ardent advocates for liberty as leading to the formation of an aristocratic body, and therefore subversive of the principles of the revolution. An intimation like this, in the infancy of our institutions, however groundless in itself, was sufficient to excite alarm. The dangers of the past were overlooked in the apprehension for the future; the measure was reprobated, and these meritorious officers became the objects of unfounded jealousy. To quiet these unreasonable fears, the petitioners expressed their willingness to waive the literal fulfilment of the promise which had been given—to remove the cause which could have a tendency to deprive them of the confidence of their fellow-citizens—to surrender the boon they had so dearly purchased; and, in addition to all that they had done, and to all that they had suffered, to offer up their future prospects upon the altar of their country. And could any thing be more preposterous than to attempt to found upon an act, originating in motives like these, the right to prescribe the terms of commutation? But it is alleged that the officers received the commutation certificates,

and, by doing so, must be presumed to have assented to their being considered a full satisfaction of their demands. This inference was, in his opinion, removed by the peculiar circumstances under which the certificates were given. These circumstances, he said, are not unworthy of the deliberate attention of the Senate. Previous to October, 1783, and subsequent to the time when the signature of the preliminary articles of peace was known to the army, frequent applications had been made in their behalf, to Congress, for an adjustment of accounts, and payment of the large arrearages which were due. These applications were fruitless. The failure of States to comply with the requisitions of Congress, deprived that body of the means of discharging their engagements; and with a full sense of the services and privations of the army, and of the injustice they were about to commit, Congress were on the point of disbanding them, unpaid and unrequited, and sending them penniless and almost naked to their homes. The effect of this anticipated measure upon minds sensibly alive to indignity and injury, may be easily imagined. At the moment when passion might have triumphed over reason, the army was addressed by an anonymous writer on the subject of their wrongs, with a degree of eloquence calculated to redeem, if any thing could redeem, the vicious tendency of his principles. He admonished them of the futility of their complaints, and urged them, by every motive that could be addressed to their hopes and to their fears, to change the supplicatory style of a memorial to language more becoming those who had the means of redress within their hands. At that perilous moment, on the events of which were suspended the honor of the army and the future welfare of the country, their commander-in-chief appeared amongst them. He conjured them to give one more distinguished proof of unexampled patriotism, patience and virtue; to rise superior to the most complicated sufferings, and by the dignity of their conduct give posterity occasion to say, when speaking of their glorious example—"Had this day been wanting, the world had never seen the last stage of perfection which human nature is capable of attaining."

"They listened to the voice of their beloved commander, followed his advice, surrendered their arms, and sunk, penniless, into the ranks of private life. In the succeeding month, the certificates of commutation were tendered by the paymaster general, who requested only an acknowledgment of their receipt, while in relation to the final settlement certificates for their pay, he required a full discharge of their demands.—The certificates thus tendered, were accepted, and in almost every case immediately sold, for the purpose of satisfying the most urgent necessities of nature. He asked the Senate whether it would comport with the dignity and honor of a great and magnanimous people, to avail themselves of an acceptance extorted by circumstances like these; and to urge it as sufficient to bar the claims of justice, and divest their protectors in the hour of danger of their stipulated reward?"

"One word more, and he had done. The Senator from Maine, (Mr Chandler) who, although he

had lost his father in the struggle, had felt it to be his duty (and there was no man, he believed, who more implicitly followed his sense of duty) to oppose the bill, had with his characteristic shrewdness and pertinacity, asked—did General Washington, whilst at the head of Government, ever recommend this subject to the notice of Congress? The worthy Senator well knew what the answer must be, and the train of reflections it must give rise to. General Washington did not—but why? Before and after the war, he spared no pains to make the States sensible of what was due to the officers on this very point. His letters have been read. He urged them by all the considerations that belonged to the subject, to act efficiently for their relief. He failed. After he came into the Government, the officers themselves evinced no disposition to revive their claims, and it certainly would not have become him to be the first to bring them forward. It is not difficult to conceive why the officers were, at that day, willing to avoid all applications for pecuniary aid. New prospects opened—they were probably not exempt from those feelings of ambition and hope of preferment which actuate mankind. They have outlived them, and they humbly ask for justice. But, sir, what was the language of the father of his country, when the subject was an open one? In his circular of June, 1783, to the Governors of the States, he said—"The provision of half pay for life, as promised by the resolution of Congress, was a reasonable compensation offered at a time when Congress had nothing else to give to the officers for services then to be performed; it was the price of their *blood* and your *independence*, and as a debt of honor, it can never be cancelled until it be fairly discharged." One question, said Mr Van Buren, and I have done. Has it been fairly discharged?"

*Governor of New York—Secretary of State—  
Foreign Affairs.*

After a career of somewhat less than eight years, thus eminently distinguished, Mr Van Buren was elected by the citizens of his own State, to fill the highest office in their gift. On the 1st January, 1829, he entered on the duties of Governor of New York. He, however, retained it but a short time. About two months afterwards, as soon as General Jackson became President, he selected Mr Van Buren for the first place in his administration, and appointed him Secretary of State. The short duration of his term of Governor did not prevent him from leaving the impress of his talent and patriotism, by the introduction of salutary provisions for the independence and security of elections, and of measures calculated to repress and control either the fraudulent or imprudent schemes of banking corporations. His recommendations on the latter subject were violently attacked and misrepresented, at the time, by his political opponents, but they have stood the test of scrutiny and experience, and now receive the unqualified approbation of friends and foes.

Mr Van Buren, when he entered on the duties of the Department of State, on the 12th March, 1829, had none of that important aid which was enjoyed by most of his predecessors, by reason

of their being associated with those who had performed the same duties. Mr Van Buren entered an administration of which no member had ever occupied a place in the Executive branch of the Government, and served under a President who was in the same situation. Notwithstanding this, the records of the Department will show that, at no previous period of the Government, was there as much official labor performed in the same time, or so successful a result to so many negotiations with foreign countries, as during the two years that Mr Van Buren was Secretary of State. The long contested colonial question with Great Britain was adjusted on the terms previously sought for by the United States. New negotiations were opened with France, which resulted in a treaty giving indemnity for commercial spoliation that had been cause of complaint for twenty years. An adjustment was effected with Denmark, by which an indemnity for the demands of our citizens fourfold larger than that previously offered, was secured. Spain, who had positively refused redress for depredations on our commerce, not only secured it in a satisfactory manner, but was induced to relax in our favor her proverbial repugnance to a change in her commercial regulations. Portugal gave us indemnity for spoliation. Turkey entered into a commercial treaty, an object which had been sought for from the days of Mr Jefferson. Austria concluded a similar convention, and the way was opened for effecting one with Russia, as was subsequently done. On our own continent, our embarrassed relations with Mexico and Colombia, were restored to a better position; and those with the latter, especially, were placed on a favorable footing. This series of interesting and important arrangements relative to the foreign intercourse of his country, so successfully conducted by Mr Van Buren in an administration of but two years' duration, is a proof of political sagacity, industry, and talent, which is not surpassed in the history of any nation.

*Minister to England—Rejection by the Senate—  
Vice President.*

In June 1831, Mr Van Buren resigned the office of Secretary of State, with the reluctant consent of President Jackson, by whom he was soon after appointed Minister to Great Britain. He did not receive this appointment, separating him as it did from his own country, and especially from his own State, which had so often honored him, without great hesitation; but our minister there being already recalled, his own acquaintance with existing negotiations made Gen. Jackson desirous that he should enter upon it. To those wishes he assented, and in August 1831, sailed for England. Immediately on his arrival there, he commenced, under the best auspices, a course of negotiation on pending questions, which he believed would be, if successful, as useful to his country as honorable to himself. While thus employed abroad, his nomination was submitted by the President at home to the Senate for their constitutional advice and consent. The decision of that body; and its effect upon the public mind, are events too recent and too well understood by the American people, to render it in any respect ne-



cessary to dwell upon them at the present time. They produced the immediate return of Mr Van Buren to the United States, and he found, from the instant of his arrival, that he had come back to a people who were equally able and disposed to protect those public servants who had proved themselves worthy of their confidence. As the period of electing a Vice President of the United States was at hand, he was immediately selected as a candidate for that high office, and chosen, shortly after, by one hundred and eighty-nine electoral votes.

On the 4th March 1833, Mr Van Buren entered upon the office of Vice President. His public address on that occasion elicited the applause of all parties, and its moderation was rendered the more conspicuous and honorable from the circumstances of his rejection to which we have alluded. The nature of the office of course removed him, in a great degree, from the active exertions required by those he had previously held; but, as the official head of the Senate, he merited and received the approbation of his political opponents, as well as of his friends, by the simplicity and kindness of his personal deportment, and his uniform and careful attention to the duties of the chair. Although he came to the station under circumstances calculated to excite the strongest opposition on the part of some of the leading men of the Senate, yet such was their sense of the exalted principles and magnanimous feeling which guided him in the discharge of his functions, that they unanimously passed the following resolution:

“Resolved, That the Senate cordially reciprocate the sentiments of personal kindness expressed by Martin Van Buren, Vice President of the United States, towards the members of this body, in taking leave of them; and that the thanks of the same be presented to him in testimony of the impartiality, dignity and ability with which he has presided over their deliberations, and of their entire approbation of his conduct in the discharge of the important and arduous duties assigned him as President of the Senate.”

*Elected President—Inaugural Address—Administration of Foreign Affairs.*

As the term of service of General Jackson approached its conclusion, the wishes of the Republican party settled, almost without a dissenting voice, upon Mr Van Buren as his successor in the Presidential chair. A numerous body of delegates, representing the Democracy of the Union, which assembled at Baltimore in the month of June 1835, unanimously nominated him for that high office; and in the month of December 1836, he was elected President of the United States, having received one hundred and seventy of the electoral votes.

On the 4th of March, 1837, the venerable Jackson retired from office, and Mr Van Buren succeeded him, pledged to carry out the same system of republican policy, and receiving from the Democratic party the same confidence and support which they had given to that patriotic statesman and illustrious man. His inaugural address disclosed, with that frankness which has always characterized him in the annunciation of his pol-

itical principles, the course of policy which he would pursue; and he has clung to those principles with undeviating consistency and firmness. He was attacked from the start by an opposition the most violent, unfair, and calumnious that this country has seen since the days of the Hartford Convention, and the Federal onset against Mr. Madison—factions of every kind to which ambition, fanaticism, avarice and money can give birth, combined together—yet never were they able to induce or establish one solitary act or sentiment incompatible with the principles of the Democratic party by whom he was elected. So closely did he adhere to the doctrines of Thomas Jefferson, its great leader, that he aroused the Federal party in all its former virulence, until they began to enact the same scenes, and pursue the same system of opposition which marked their course towards that immortal champion of Democracy. Mr. Van Buren proved in that contest, that his firmness and his reliance on the support of the people, in every emergency, is not a less striking trait in his character than the other high qualities which he previously displayed. He kept the old republican track manfully and fearlessly. He pursued it with intrepid perseverance through sunshine and storm. In every measure of his administration, whether relative to foreign or domestic policy, he was found to follow in the footsteps of Jefferson and Jackson.

There is one particular in which the political life of Mr. Van Buren has been distinguished from all the public men of his generation. Whilst his whole career has been one of uninterrupted, and it may be added, on their part, unmitigated warfare with his political opponents, he has, at every important crisis in his affairs, except the very first, stood without a rival in his own party. At his first selection for the Legislature, he met with an opposition which convulsed deeply the Democracy of his native county, opposed as his nomination was by several distinguished Republicans of strong influence and powerful connexions. The great majority, however, espoused his cause with enthusiasm, and carried him triumphantly through the contest. All his subsequent nominations and appointments may be said to have received the unanimous assent of his political friends. In the second selection of him for the State Legislature—his appointment as Attorney General—his nominations to the State Convention, twice to the Senate of the United States, and once as Governor of New York—his appointments as Secretary of State and Minister to England—his nominations for Vice President, for President, and again for a second term as President—in all these he has been uniformly sustained by his political friends with an unprecedented degree of unanimity and cordiality.

Our foreign relations Mr. Van Buren conducted, while President, with the same success that attended him while Secretary of State. More than six millions of dollars, collected as indemnities for injuries done by foreign nations, were paid over to our citizens. Our embittered relations with Mexico were terminated by an honorable treaty, recognising the claims of our citizens, and providing for their prompt adjustment. The difficulties with Great Britain on our Northern

and Eastern frontiers, were treated with a calmness, courage, patriotism and prudence—united with a high sense of national honor—that wrung, even from political opponents, the meed of unqualified approbation; and it is not unworthy of remark, that, while the course of the British cabinet, on these questions, called forth strong animadversion from the party opposed to it in England, both parties there, as well as in the United States, approved of Mr. Van Buren's conduct.

In addition to this, indemnities were obtained from Texas and Holland; treaties were completed; with the Peru-Bolivian Confederation, Greece and Sardinia; commercial conventions were agreed upon with Ecuador and Belgium; and our national character, and the principles of our maritime law, were recognized and respected in the most distant quarters of the globe. The name of America maintains a proud pre-eminence among foreign nations, and that determination, adhered to without a moment's faltering throughout the administrations of Jackson and Van Buren, to ask nothing but what was right, and submit to nothing that is wrong, has taught the other Governments of the world a salutary respect and fear, of which our country may be justly proud.

*Speculation and Overtrading—Bank Suspension—Extra Session—Independent Constitutional Treasury—Reduction of Expenditures.*

Mr. Van Buren found his domestic administration embarrassed, at its outset, by the mania of speculation and overtrading, which had resulted from the enormous expansions of the Bank of the United States—the favorite machine of Federalism, to which he had himself expressed, and always maintained, unqualified and uncompromising opposition. Within less than three months after he came into office, the catastrophe, which was the inevitable consequence of that vicious system, occurred. Seven hundred banks violated, as if by one impulse, the positive provisions of their charters, and suspended specie payments. Twenty-seven millions of accumulated revenue, the property of the people, were thus locked up in their vaults, and withheld from public uses in a legal currency. An attempt was made to force Mr. Van Buren to recognise their depreciated paper. This he refused to do; but assembling Congress together in the month of September, 1837, he brought to their attention in a message, which has been happily called 'the monumental message,' and which will ever be regarded as a manifesto of the principles of the Democratic party, the existing state of things, and recommended the establishment of an Independent Constitutional Treasury, which should forever separate Bank and State, and prevent the use of the public moneys by incorporated companies for their own purposes and profit.

Actuated by the same spirit, he continued, through all the difficulties thrown in his way, to adhere to the principles with which he started. He maintained the sacred standard of value. Every payment from the Treasury, whether of principal or interest, was provided for in the constitutional currency; and in the midst of bank suspensions on the one hand, and projects devised

by Federalism on the other, to increase the expenses of the Government and raise the outcry of extravagance, the public faith was preserved inviolate. These results, too, were attained, not only without the slightest additions to the public burdens, but during a period in which the people were relieved from more than one hundred and seventy millions of indirect taxes, that would have been required under the high tariff of 1828, and in which Mr. Van Buren was sedulously employed in bringing about a decrease in the various branches of the public expenditures. Thus, in 1838, he had reduced them below those of 1837, the appropriations for which had been made during the previous Administration, and were rendered larger than usual by extraordinary occurrences, and the temptations to expenditure resulting from an overflowing Treasury. In 1839, the expenditures of the Government were reduced between six and seven millions, and in 1840 the estimates exhibit a reduction of between five and six millions. Such was Mr. Van Buren's administration in regard to currency and finance; eminently distinguished by its strict accordance with the principles of the Democratic party absolutely necessary to preserve the Republic from that fatal boon of Federalism, a National Bank; and now waiting only that final ratification of the American people, which will be given by the re-election of him, its manly and persevering advocate, to secure to us the currency which was contemplated by the fathers of the Revolution.

*War and Navy Departments—Post Office—Relations with the States—Domestic Slavery—Renomination for the Presidency.*

The administration of Mr. Van Buren was not less worthy of praise in every other branch of the public service. In the course of it great vigor and activity were imparted to the War Department. The securities for an efficient and economical administration of the army were increased. In the Engineer, the Ordnance, and the Topographical Departments, important improvements were made. The Indian tribes to the number of thirty-six thousand souls, were peaceably removed and settled in their own new homes west of the Mississippi, and beyond the borders of the States; and, except in the case of the ruthless Seminoles, who were waging war against our people when Mr. Van Buren entered upon the Government, there was no one act of severity that could be avoided, nor has a drop of blood been unnecessarily shed.

In the Navy, the materials for future construction were largely increased, the number of vessels augmented, and persevering efforts made to revive and invigorate its discipline. Notwithstanding these measures, and also the additional expense arising out of the Exploring Expedition, the expenditures of the Department were decreased; and, at the same time, American commerce so effectually protected in every quarter of the globe, as to attract the public and favorable notice of other nations.

The Post Office establishment, one of the most complicated and extended of all the departments of the Government, was managed with an ability,



firmness, economy, and skill, that have secured the approbation even of angry political foes.

In all those relations, which the Constitution permits or requires, between the Executive Department of the Union and the Governments and people of the States, the course of Mr. Van Buren was without reproach. He evinced, by every means in his power, a strict attention to the right and interests of the States, and a wise and becoming forbearance on every point reserved and belonging exclusively to them. In that deep and all-absorbing question, arising out of these relations—the subject of domestic slavery—he pursued, in the midst of fanatical and political excitement, a course so temperate and wise, that it must secure for him the unmixed approbation of every friend of the Union, and every citizen desirous to uphold the time-honored compromises of the Constitution. Shrinking from no responsibility, not hesitating to avow at the outset, and before the assembled people, his fixed determination to oppose, in all its shapes, the reckless fanaticism of Abolition, he maintained the same open course from first to last, and thus contributed to rally the whole Democratic party of the North and South in that strict alliance upon this question, which is necessary to protect our political fabric from being tumbled into ruins.

It was this wise course of administration that obtained for Mr. Van Buren his second nomination for the Presidency by the Democratic party, and secured for the decision of the Baltimore Convention, a cordial response from the whole Republican family. It is this which induces so vast a body of his countrymen to seek again to place him in the Executive chair. It would indeed be a sufficient title to this cordial support, that he has been every where singled out as the object of the bitterest opposition by those very men, and that very party, who are notoriously opposed to the principles of Democracy. It would

be sufficient, that, among the various of local politics, and in moments of the local excitement, there has been no dissension in regard to him; no distrust of principles or apprehension of his conduct—he has higher claims than these. We American people, in the exercise of their assented and voluntary choice, select a man for Chief Magistrate of fifteen millions of free people—he must be one whose principles are not concealed, and of whose genius, character, and virtues, they may be justly proud. Have the people a right to be proud of Martin Van Buren, citizen, a statesman, and a man? Trace from his youth upwards; he is found on every occasion zealous and active in the cause of his country. Behold him called to high places of political trust—in every crisis his admirable talents are displayed, his honest sentiments boldly and properly avowed; he is seen throughout his whole career, the thorough and consistent Democrat, in whom there is no shadow of turning; he is the protector of the worn out veteran; the advocate and strenuous supporter of the late war; the friend of internal improvement in his native State, though not of scrambling and lavish expenditures by Congress; the successful assertor of his country's rights with foreign nations; the wise administrator of the complicated and arduous duties of the Chief Magistracy; the friend and undaunted supporter of a sound currency; the uncompromising foe of a National Bank, and of every measure calculated to entail it on his country; the prompt and manly foe of reckless fanaticism, and the conscientious supporter of the rights of the States. Turn from the statesman to the man; against his virtues inquisitive envy and inventive calumny have scarcely ventured to utter a single charge—in all the charities of life, in every social and domestic relation, he stands before his countrymen without stain and without reproach.

